Pre-service ~~Possibilities~~: Reconsidering "Art for the Elementary Educator"

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"Art for the Elementary Educator" courses are sites of ~~possibility~~ in the field of art education, particularly art education oriented toward curriculum integration and meaningful art experiences. Drawing on literature about "Art for the Elementary Educator" courses and our own teaching experiences we make recommendations for reconsidering possible futures for this course as related to the future of art education. We believe that this course, its students, instructors, and course materials are worthy of sustained attention by the art education community. Ultimately, we argue that art education appreciation and advocacy, concepts we define in our concluding remarks, should be primary objectives for such classes. Reconsidering "Art for the Elementary Educator" in light of these ideas requires renewed examination of course content, student dispositions, instructor preparation, and teaching and learning resources.

Introduction: When Life Gives You ~~Possibilities~~, Make Possibilities

Over the last few years, we have both taught versions of the course commonly referred to as "Art for the Elementary Educator." When we began teaching these courses, our colleagues and supervisors repeatedly told us to anticipate challenges. They warned us that students routinely came to the class with little to no art background and might show resistance to contemporary ideas about comprehensive art education in favor of holiday art lesson plans reminiscent of their own *positive* experiences as elementary art students. As we suggest throughout this paper, the literature provided equally discouraging forecasts.

As predicted, "Art for the Elementary Educator" has been a challenging class for us to teach. Although we were warned about, we were not prepared for our students' overwhelming interests in "school art" (Efland, 1976) and fear of the creative ambiguity that is part of artistic and intellectual endeavors. Few of our students had comprehensive exposure to the diversity of images and objects that comprise contemporary artworlds or appreciation for art as a way of making meaning and integrating curriculum (Stewart & Walker, 2005). In turn, their confidence in discussing art or imagining how art could help them provide their students engaging educational experiences was restricted. Facing challenges such as these, we began discussing our teaching practices, reading extant literature about the seemingly inherent ~~possibilities~~ of the course, and attempting to identify its possibilities.

Over time, we came to view the course as a significant site of ~~possibilities~~ for art education. We use the term ~~possibilities~~ to suggest that while this course has potential for providing pre-service elementary educators with meaningful reintroductions to art education, such opportunities have often been overlooked. Some departments offering this course have, for example, regarded it as service to their university, rather than the field of art education. As such, they have not invested significant human or material resources in the development these courses as readily as they have in courses for art education majors. In such instances, the importance of this course to the field may have been overlooked. Because of the potential effect elementary generalists have on the art education that their students receive, we believe this is an influential course in the field. We contrast such ~~possibilities,~~ with new possibilities that highlight the potential inherent in these courses and their importance to the field of art education. Many elementary generalist teachers are their students' primary art instructors (Kowalchuk & Stone 2003; McKean, 1999). Indeed, a 1999-2000 study by the National Council for Educational

Statistics (NCES) found that only 55 percent of elementary schools that include art in their curricula employ a full-time art specialist (as cited in Chapman, 2005). Considering these statistics, it seems clear that preparing elementary generalists to meaningfully integrate art into their classes as well as to advocate for arts specialists in their schools should be a primary concern of those leading the field of art education. To meet these objectives, art educators must commit more resources towards researching, writing, and teaching *for*, as well as *about*, elementary generalist educators.

Calls for Possibilities

We are not alone in our call for increased attention to "Art for the Elementary Educator." The Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870, which called upon public school educators to teach drawing, is often regarded as the launching point for the field of art education. As Jeffers (1995) suggested, however, the contemporary field of art education has not always invested substantial resources on elementary generalists. Is this representative of a fear that by preparing elementary generalists to teach art, art educators are demonstrating our own expendability? Ironically, although the field has not always provided significant support for educating elementary generalist teachers, it has been called a "bread and butter" course by some and is a consistent source of revenue for some art education programs (Jeffers, 1991; Allison, 2007)[2]. Perhaps more importantly, as Jeffers (1995) noted, "...policy-makers at state universities and state departments of education consider preservice art education so important that an elementary art methods course is required [often] for graduation and certification" (p. 17). She went on to observe the contradiction that "...these same policymakers frequently do not consider K-12 art courses to be so important" (p. 17)[3].

NAEA's support of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium's "Model Standards for Licensing Classroom

Teachers and Specialists in the Arts" (INTASC, 2002) suggests that possibilities may be unfolding. That document calls for the preparation of and collaboration between classroom teachers *and* arts specialists to support comprehensive art education. In addition to supporting INTASC, the NAEA has also funded research on this course (Denton, 1998). While we agree with NAEA that having an art specialist in every school is an important goal, we also recognize that in order for arts specialists to collaborate with elementary classroom teachers, both groups must be able to envision the potential benefits of such work.

The purpose of this article is to summarize and further the discussion of "Art for the Elementary Educator" as a site of possibilities for the field of art education. In what follows, we continue our call to action with a discussion of the general goals, objectives, and structure of "Art for the Elementary Educator" courses derived from our experiences, our review literature written about the course, and an informal survey we conducted over the NAEA Higher Education listserv in the spring of 2007. We organized our questions around the following areas of concern: the form and content of the course itself; the beliefs and attitudes of students enrolled in the course; and resources available for use in the class. Much of what we say here is indeed a review of past research about ~~possibilities~~ attributed to this course. However, we hope that by reconsidering this research in the language of possibilities we might revitalize this rhetoric, as it relates to the perspectives, responsibilities, and needs of classroom teachers as well as the future of art education. Ultimately, we define and recommend art education appreciation and art education advocacy as possible objectives to guide the reconstruction of "Art for the Elementary Educator."

Planning the Form and Content of "Art for the Elementary

Educator"

Like its title, the specific form and content of "Art for the Elementary Educator" varies according to institutional context and instructor. From our survey, we learned that amidst this diversity, the course typically aims to meet some or all of the following basic goals – introduce stages of development in children's artmaking practices, foster art appreciation, provide studio art making experiences, develop art education lessons or units, build an understanding of integrated or interdisciplinary curriculum, and share art education methods. This is a formidable agenda. Jodi's course, for example, meets only once a week for two hours and forty-eight minutes over a ten-week quarter. This hardly seems like enough time to unpack and navigate the "ill-structured" (Efland, 2002) discipline of art and the diverse producers and theories of visual culture now in vogue. We examined publications on "Art for the Elementary Educator" in relation to the three overlapping emphases of art education Eisner (1972) identified in *Educating Artistic Vision* —student-, discipline-, and society-centered.

Writing from a student-centered perspective, Davis (1960) argued for the importance of introducing stages of child development throughout the course. Additionally, she promoted the idea that creative work in "Art for the Elementary Educator" should be meaningful to the students in that course for themselves as learners in addition to enabling them to envisage the kind of work they might do with their own students. Similarly, Andrews (1982) argued that pre-service teachers need to participate in "significant experiences" which he defined as private opportunities for them to examine and communicate their feelings and values about art and life. Both authors advocate for a course that goes beyond having university students create replicas of what elementary students might make. They argue that when pre-service teachers have meaningful engagements with art education, they will be more likely to provide such experiences

for their students.

Speaking from a discipline-centered perspective, Siegesmund suggested, "we need to put a lot of emphasis on how teaching creating is different from following directions" (R. Siegesmund, personal communication, July 23, 2006). Illustrating the importance of this statement at all levels of instruction, Melanie found many of her students requested projects in which they copied a teacher's example, in a seemingly trivial step-by-step manner. Her students were frustrated when she assigned projects that required them to generate their own ideas. Similarly, Roberts identified "the [low] comfort level that the elementary generalists themselves have with approaching art as inquiry" (T. Roberts, personal communication, August 10, 2006). Davis (1960) provided encouragement for challenging students to appreciate and approach artmaking as more than following a recipe: "Nothing could be worse than an art education course based upon the creation of the easy, the short cut, and the novel, a sure way to the creation of trivialities" (p. 243). In other words, "Art for the Elementary Educator," like elementary art itself, should provide opportunities for students to "think like an artist" (Roland, 2004) in the most intellectual and technically-engaged senses of the term.

Pre-service elementary educators might practice one way of thinking like an artist by, "using old ideas to create new ideas and ways of seeing things" (Roland, 2004) by discussing possible variations of projects they create in class (Davis, 1960). Jodi explored this theory and a society-centered approach to art education, through a photographic exploration of a university environment intended to foster students' understanding of the Reggio Emilia theory that the classroom is the "third teacher" (Kushins & Brisman, 2004; Strong-Wilson, 2007). After taking and discussing images of their school, she asked students to brainstorm ways they might alter or continue such an investigation with their own students. Recommendations included interviews with school personnel, making murals and using

printmaking to create public messages. Through such discussions, students practice cognitive flexibility and prepare to develop their own visual art projects authentically related to their students' lives and curricula.

Kowalchuk and Stone (2003) also argued for a society-centered art education. They noted the importance of helping students see "...the impact of the visual world on daily life" (p. 153). In other words, "Art for the Elementary Educator" instructors need to help students rethink the social contexts by which art is made. Our efforts to address this in our teaching have been met with both affection and resistance. For instance, Melanie found that the majority of students in her classes believed that art is usually about artists' personal feelings rather responses to social and cultural contexts. This observation is further compounded by McKean's (1999) study that found that elementary generalists value the arts as a tool for self-expression. Jodi found her students were responsive to Szekely's (1989) idea of incorporating close examinations and extended discussion of the structure and function of objects during show and tell. They demonstrated resistance, however, to extending such discussions to include critical analyses of the power and privileges inherent in the design and consumption of such objects advocated by Tavin and Anderson (2003). As we discuss in the next section of this paper, our students' reservations reflect beliefs and values about art and culture they bring with them to educational arenas.

Pre-service Students Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Art and Art Education

Perhaps it goes without saying that art educators should always take their students' beliefs and values about art into consideration when facilitating a course. This seems particularly important in regard to "Art for the Elementary Educator." While teachers of this course have spent years studying the arts, most pre-service elementary

educators have not. This can make it difficult for teachers and students to relate to one another's perspectives and expectations. One strategy some instructors use is to ask students in "Art for the Elementary Educator" to write and talk about their previous experiences with art and art education. Data gleaned from these exercises have been used to generate research on pre-service elementary generalists beliefs about art (Forrer, 2001; Smith-Shank,1993; Thompson,1997). These studies reveal two important patterns in the art education experiences of pre-service elementary generalists: *negative* experiences fostered anxiety, rather than appreciation for art and *positive* memories of art and art education were often tied to notions of downtime and holiday celebrations. In what follows, we summarize and expound upon these findings.

Art Anxiety

Multiple authors (Jeffers, 1991, 1995; Metcalf & Smith-Shank, 2001) used the term "art anxiety" to refer to the intense fear and intimidation many pre-service elementary generalists report about art and art making. In studies of their students, Smith-Shank (1993) and Metcalf and Smith-Shank (2001) found that many had unfavorable, anxious-ridden memories of their own elementary art educators. The authors labeled these teachers "dragons" and compared their behaviors to those of the mythical beasts who "inflict injury on their students, not by stinging, but by subtle and often unreflective blows" (p. 45). Smith-Shank argued that having a dragon art teacher may contribute to students' abandonment of creative practices in their middle childhood.[4] Similarly, our students recalled vague or limited criteria for assessment that left them feeling badly when their work was not praised and displayed.

In a related study, Forrer (2001) asked her pre-service elementary generalists to write about their elementary art education memories. Based on their essays, she also identified an anxiety in students'

memories about art classroom management, including assessment of their art skills, and their attitudes about art. As a result, Forrer highlighted the importance of teachers' attitudes, planning, and management skills as objectives for "Art for the Elementary Educator." In other words, how material is introduced in this course may be as, if not more important, than what is covered. Students should be given opportunities to reflect on their prior art education as they encounter new possibilities for art and art education. Again, instructors of "Art for the Elementary Educator," perhaps more than others, must embrace the latent possibilities of designing and implementing integrated curriculum around real-world relevant themes and open-ended assignments. This may assist in the development of positive understandings and perceptions of art and art education rather than reaffirming the negative perceptions that some of our students bring to the class.

Student Understandings of Art and Art Education

Other survey-based studies have focused on students' beliefs about art, understandings of the goals of art education, past experiences with art teachers, and the artmaking skills they bring to "Art for the Elementary Educator." For example, Kowalchuk and Stone (2003) surveyed pre-service elementary generalists' (before and after they took "Art for the Elementary Educator") and in-service teachers about their beliefs about and approaches to teaching art. Analyzing the three groups' responses, Kowalchuk and Stone found contradictions between respondents' knowledge of art and beliefs about how art should be taught. For example, while students expressed appreciation for art history as a source of cultural enrichment and space for curricular integration, they simultaneously argued that elementary art education should emphasize self-expression. Understanding and bridging this disconnect is a leading issue in realizing the possibilities of "Art for the Elementary Educator."[5]

As a methods course, "Art for the Elementary Educator" is not primarily intended to teach content. However, Galbraith (1992) noted, with the expansion of art education beyond production activities, classroom teachers must "widen their limited perspectives of art education" (p. 87). Given the limited experience many elementary educators have examining, critiquing, and creating art and visual culture, variations of this class often incorporate experiences in art appreciation and art making for pre-service teachers themselves.

Kowalchuk and Stone (2003) found that 86% of respondents to their survey had taken a university-level art history course, most often to fulfill a general education requirement. This is a promising statistic that suggests pre-service teachers have studied art, however, before celebrating we must ask what and how students are introduced to in such courses. If the focus of introductory art history courses is chronology and form, students may continue to view art in isolation from the social contexts in which and for which it is made. As a result, they might ask, as one of Melanie's students asked her, "Why do we have to do all this stuff with community? Why can't we just draw pretty pictures like we would in a *real* school?" Challenging the pre-service elementary generalists' views about art pushes them into territory that may be uncomfortable. In our experiences, this may lead to further resistance, rather than encouraging them to change and expand their views of art education. Exploring ways to harness this resistance is another area of possibility for "Art for the Elementary Educator."

Among in-service respondents, Kowalchuk and Stone (2003) found appreciation for and desire to forefront art in the elementary classroom. These comments were tempered, however, by reality checks regarding restrictions of time and space elementary generalists meet in their day-to-day school lives. Preparing elementary educators to advocate for time and space for the arts in their classrooms is another important possibility instructors of "Art for the Elementary Educator"

need to consider. Additionally, the importance of contemplating and sharing ways for educators to meaningfully integrate subjects they are studying with their students with responding to and creating works of art and visual culture must not be underestimated. Many elementary educators do appreciate the benefits of hands-on activities. But do all "active" learning exercises constitute art education? An assessment and reconsideration of common elementary classroom projects including dioramas, thematic illustrated books, and studies of monuments might be a first step in bridging the gap between art and elementary educational objectives. Investigating the potential of forms that the pre-service elementary generalists are already familiar with, we may be able to focus more attention on teaching them ways to make the content of an these projects meaningful.

Teaching Materials

There are numerous textbooks used in the "Art for the Elementary Educator" class including: *Children and their Art* (Hurwitz & Day, 2000), *Artworks for Elementary Teachers: Developing Artistic and Perceptual Awareness* (Heberholz & Heberholz, 1997), *The Colors of Learning: Integrating the Visual Arts into the Early Childhood Curriculum* (Althouse, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2003), *Contemporary Issues in Art Education* (Gaudelius & Spiers, 2002), *Emphasis Art* (Wachowiak & Clements, 2005), and *Rethinking Curriculum in Art Education* (Stewart & Walker, 2005). Based upon our recent survey, we found that *Emphasis Art* is the most commonly used book among the fourteen respondents who indicated a title for the textbook they use. These books provide overviews of generally accepted stages of children's development in drawing, introductions to basic materials, vocabulary (focused around the elements and principles of art), and frameworks for developing curriculum in art including discipline-based (DBAE) and thematic approaches, among other topics. Many of these texts are cross-marketed toward pre-service

elementary generalists and pre-service art teachers, two populations with different pre-existing knowledge bases, interests, and needs. Based on our experiences teaching the class, we believe pre-service elementary generalists have different concerns than pre-service art teachers. Like one respondent to our survey who reported that "there's no good textbook for this class," we have found the need to qualify and supplement textbooks with journal articles that address contemporary ideas or issues particular to non-arts specialists.

Unfortunately, looking through journals for articles to use with this class, we noticed that the vast majority of those we read were written primarily *about* "Art for the Elementary Educator" course content and students rather than *for* use in designing or teaching the class. For example, Metcalf and Smith-Shank's (2001) "The Yellow Brick Road of Art Education" includes excerpts from pre-service elementary educators' reflections on their art educations and experiences entering "Art for the Elementary Educator." The authors metaphorically relate these comments to the scarecrow, tin man, and lion in *The Wizard of Oz* and these characters' ultimate realizations that they have the brains, heart, and courage to confront their fears. The authors did share these analogies with pre-service elementary generalists and received positive feedback. We believe the students' positive responses may have reflected their appreciation for their teachers' attention to elementary generalists' strengths as well as their fears about art and art education. Feeling they were not alone and that their professors recognized and respected their art anxiety may have prepared the students to challenge their preconceived ideas about art and art education. Thus, this is an important descriptive article in the field *about* the course and the students who take it.

Duncum's (1999) "What Elementary Generalists Need to Know to Teach Art Well" also recognizes, and directly addresses, pre-service elementary generalists and their fears about teaching art. Duncum outlined several strategies for creating and responding to art that

could easily be incorporated into elementary teachers' existing practices. Responding to art is a novel concept and new possibility for many pre-service elementary generalist students. While drawing might seem like something they cannot do and therefore cannot teach, talking about works of art seems less frightening, though they may not have had previous experience with interpreting art works. Some of the specific strategies Duncum outlined are new to our students; however, they are presented so that that they seem both realistic and feasible. Most of our students are receptive to the strategies he proposes and are able to relate some of their own classroom experiences, as both students and teachers, to Duncum's recommendations. Thus, this is an important article in our field, one of the few written specifically *for* students in the "Art for Elementary Educators" course.

Though there are some articles that addresses strategies for teaching "Art for the Elementary Educator" and offer ideas for instructors, (Ballengee-Morris & Streideck, 1997; Buffington, 2006; Deniston-Trochta, 2002) they are rare, leaving instructors, with little support or guidance. This is particularly important because as our recent survey confirmed, numerous schools assign sections of "Art for the Elementary Educator" to graduate teaching assistants and adjunct faculty (Jeffers, 1993; Mittler, 1975). As a field, we need to move away from treating this class as the "black hole of art education" (Duncum, 1999, p. 33). A range of materials specifically *for* the students and instructors of these classes must be developed in tandem with reconsidering the possibilities of art education and the course itself.

New Possibilities for "Art for the Elementary Educator"

Through discussions and reviews of literature about "Art for the Elementary Educator," we learned that our struggles with this class were not unique. As already discussed, past research and our own

informal surveys of pre-service generalists suggest their beliefs and attitudes towards art and art education may be limited and are not always positive. We believe that our field needs to focus sustained attention on understanding and supporting the role that elementary generalists play in art education. However, we remain hopeful about possibilities for this course.

There are many topics that art educators could redress for the pre-service elementary generalist audience without fear that they will contradict the need for art specialists. We propose the terms "art education appreciation" and "art education advocacy" as two such possibilities. If pre-service elementary educators learn to *appreciate* visual art as a core subject in both name and action, they may be more willing to work with arts specialists to provide and advocate for comprehensive art education. In the following sections, we define and make recommendations for addressing these objectives.

Art Education Appreciation

As we mentioned throughout the first half of this article, many pre-service elementary educators have limited or negative views of what constitutes art education. Few are aware of the cognitive effort and impact involved in creating and responding to works of art and visual culture. Identifying and reflecting on these factors through exposure to research and their own work in "Art for the Elementary Educator" may help.

Amidst our efforts to recruit elementary educators to advocate for and help facilitate comprehensive art education, we must also recognize the increasing demands they face to rationalize their teaching objectives and strategies. Presenting the idea of education *through* art we demonstrate appreciation for elementary generalists' various responsibilities in addition to presenting them with new, more comprehensive ideas about art. Discussing, for example, theories of teaching and learning such as the integrated "project approach"

(Katz & Chard, 1989) and Reggio Emilia from the perspective of the arts is important. Jodi emphasizes arts-based integrated curriculum planning and the social contexts and implications of schooling as well as artmaking. Hers is not the only class in which students discuss these issues. She wonders how the pre-service curriculum could be revised or planned more cooperatively so that courses compliment and enhance, rather than overlap and repeat one another. Discussion of project-based learning in the art classroom should focus on the art learning achieved in such explorations. If we can address this goal, elementary classroom generalists may see more value in art and help us advocate for arts specialists while simultaneously supporting our efforts in the art room in their own classrooms.

One possibility, periodically employed at the University of Georgia, engages groups of students as curriculum teams. In this program, pre-service elementary generalists work with pre-service art teachers to develop and implement integrated lessons in local schools. This program obviously requires significant cooperation and collaboration among pre-service teachers, college instructors, and co-operating teachers (Siegesmund, personal communication, July 23, 2006). If elementary generalists and art specialists learn the importance and experience the benefits of collaborating to develop and teach integrated units during their pre-service training, they may be more likely to engage in this type of teaching once they have their own classrooms.

Art Education Advocacy

Art education appreciation and art education advocacy are two sides of the same coin. Many of Jodi's students have expressed enthusiasm for integrated and emergent curriculum design and creative approaches to "making learning visible" (Project Zero and Reggio Children, 2001). However, many doubt whether they will be able to make these things happen in their classrooms given the

current structures of schools and high-stakes testing environments. We need to encourage and prepare these students to advocate for their pedagogical ideals for the sake of their students' intellectual, social, and emotional development. We need to ensure that they have the language and knowledge to make arguments that the arts are a cognitive endeavor (Efland, 2002) in Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and in correspondence with elected officials. Pre-service teachers are voters and potential lobbyists for arts education. Through courses such as "Art for the Elementary Educator" they could be introduced to statistical research on the percentage of schools in their state with art specialists and research on the impact of arts education on children's learning.

Conclusion

We know that art instruction in elementary schools is often provided by elementary generalists (Chapman, 2005; Institute of Education Sciences, 1995; McKean, 1999; Stone & Kowalchuk, 2003) and yet our field has not devoted significant sustained attention to the "Art for Elementary Educators" course. Since at least 1960 countless authors have called for increased study of this course and a deeper understanding of the students, the effects of the course, and its outcomes (Davis, 1960; Duncum, 1999; Jeffers, 1991, 1995; Kowalchuk & Stone, 2003; Smith-Shank, 1993). We need to heed their advice, to stop thinking of this course as a black hole, and to start seeing and creating its possibilities for the future. In this article, we proposed accomplishing these goals through art education appreciation and art education advocacy, creating more materials specifically for use in this class, and challenging our national organization to devote more time and attention to this significant population of future teachers and educational leaders. By working toward these goals, we hope to turn ~~possibilities~~ into possibilities.

(Endnotes)

[1] In this article we use "Art for the Elementary Educator" to refer to courses offered to pre-service elementary generalist teachers. Institutions list such courses under various titles including, Art in the Elementary Schools (Florida State University), Art and Curriculum Concepts for Teachers (The Ohio State University), The Arts: Interdisciplinary Learning (Hunter College).

[2] In our survey, faculty from 29 universities responded. Twenty-two of these indicated that their department offers this type of course and of these 22, 15 indicated that their departments enroll between 100-600 students per year in Art for the Elementary Educator courses.

[3] While Jeffers presents a tidy contradiction, Fowler (1996 as cited in Thompson, 1997) notes that only half the states in the U.S. require pre-service elementary educators to complete art methods courses. These are important statistics to consider. One resultant possibility might be advocating for more states to require "Art for the Elementary Educator" courses.

[4] Interestingly, Metcalf and Smith-Shank (2001) found that students who did not have "art anxiety" and were comfortable with their artmaking abilities attributed their abilities to luck or talent rather than education.

[5]One article that addresses this issue is Jeffers, C. (1996). Relating controversial art and school art: A problem-position. *Studies in Art Education, 38*(1), 21-33.

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